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LOAN COLLECTION OF OLD ARTS AND CRAFTS
REPRESENTING MAINLY XVTH, XVITH AND XVII CENTURIES

EXHIBITION OF THE SOCIETY OF ARTS AND CRAFTS, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

As a result of an exhibition of Arts and Crafts, held in Boston in 1897, a society was organized, which, so far as the writer knows, was the first Society of Arts and Crafts in this country. While the name of the organization may in a measure suggest some following of the movement in England, there is a distinct difference in its purposes. In 1888, a number of English designers and craftsmen, including William Morris, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Walter Crane, and Louis F. Day, formed an organization under the name of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, so that by exhibitions, greater recognition could be secured for the arts and crafts of design, and to make the exhibitions a rallying point for all sympathetic workers. These English exhibitions have continued, with occasional lapses, up to the present time. They have been one of the greatest factors in the progress of English design, and have been world-wide in their influence.

The Society of Arts and Crafts of Boston, was organized and incorporated for the purpose of promoting artistic work in all branches

of handicraft. It has undertaken various lines of work including classes, lectures, and this year an exhibition, of which there are a number of illustrations shown. First of all, the organization was planned to be of such form as to unite and stimulate designers and craftsmen, and by its more public movements in the form of lectures and exhibitions to influence the public taste. In one of the circulars of the society, Professor Charles Eliot Norton, who was the first president, says: "It hopes to bring Designers and Workmen into mutually helpful relations, and to encourage workmen to execute designs of their own. It endeavors to stimulate in workmen an appreciation of the dignity and value of good design; to counteract the popular impatience of Law and Form, and the desire for over-ornamentation and specious originality. It will insist upon the necessity of sobriety and restraint, of ordered arrangement, of due regard for the relation between the form of an object and its use, and of harmony and fitness in the decoration put upon it."

Some of the conditions which govern a Society of Arts and Crafts and Exhibitions and some of the purposes to be sought for are interestingly expressed in the preface to the catalogue, in which the writer says:

"The century now drawing to a close has been marvelous for its mechanical and scientific development, but the very rapidity of the development, and the conditions that made it possible, have been adverse to the development of the fine arts. Indeed, with regard to the lesser arts of handicraft, we had almost reached the condition of forgetting that they might be fine arts at all; they had, in fact, for the most part, ceased to be such.

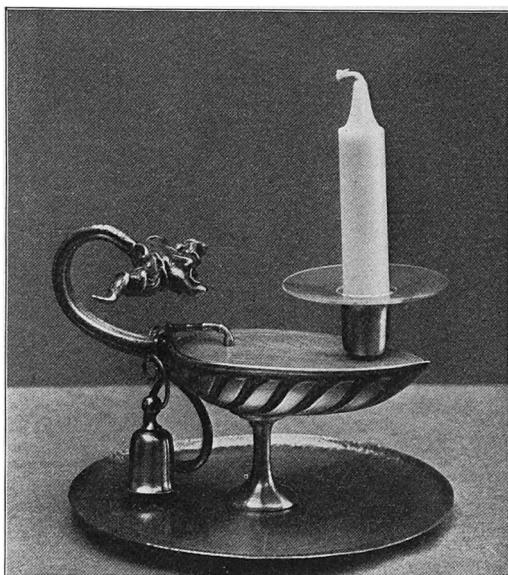
"Of late years a revival of public interest has made itself felt, first in Europe, and then in this country. This revival has called forth, and we hope will justify, such exhibitions as the present.

"There is evidence in the community of the existence among us of talent for the lesser arts of handicraft, as great perhaps as at any time, but it has been generally either crushed, stunted, or misdirected. An intelligent and instructed public, demanding what is good and refusing what is base, would rapidly call these latent talents into activity and give them direction.

"The first thing to be recognized as essential to good work is that every form must be perfectly adapted to the use for which it is intended; it must be fitting and suitable, recognition of purpose should be the dominant idea in the design. Eccentricity of form is to be avoided as vulgar. A want of harmony between the form and its use we should instinctively feel to be ugly. In the next place every form should be in harmony with the material in which it is expected. It should, indeed, be the outcome of a thorough knowledge and sensitive appreciation of the distinctive qualities, the habits of the material used, and of the methods of the particular craft em-

ployed. Out of these will grow beauty and grace of proportion and outline,—the expression of the delight which the workman takes in his work.

"In the same way the decoration put upon any object must be in harmony with its form and appropriate to its use. The more intimate the relation between the form of the object and its decoration, and the more significant the ornament, the more beautiful it will be.



DESIGNED AND MADE BY CHARLES H. BARR,
EAST GREENWICH, R. I.

Indeed, the decoration should emphasize and enhance whatever beauty of form the object may possess. The balance, the harmony, the rhythm, which are the essential æsthetic qualities of the decoration, as of the general form, will again evidence the delight of the craftsman in the work he has been doing.

"At present, in many manufactories (even those which have acquired some reputation for artistic work), the designers are kept apart from the work, are not allowed to follow the process of manufacture of their own designs, are not allowed opportunity to know anything of these processes. It is thought to be a waste of time for them: they must design, design, design. On the other hand, very few craftsmen

nowadays have had a training which would enable them to understand and appreciate artistic quality, and thus fit them to be designers. Under the conditions the designs lack intelligence and sympathy with the material, and the finished product shows the lack on the part of the workman of any feeling for the design he has carried out. It is purely mechanical. Indeed, usually each workman is a machine, who has only been allowed to do one small portion of each piece, with the result that the executed work lacks all individuality. It is a dead thing without charm. Good design is organic and living, and finds its best expression in the thing itself, not merely on paper to be unsympathetically translated by another.

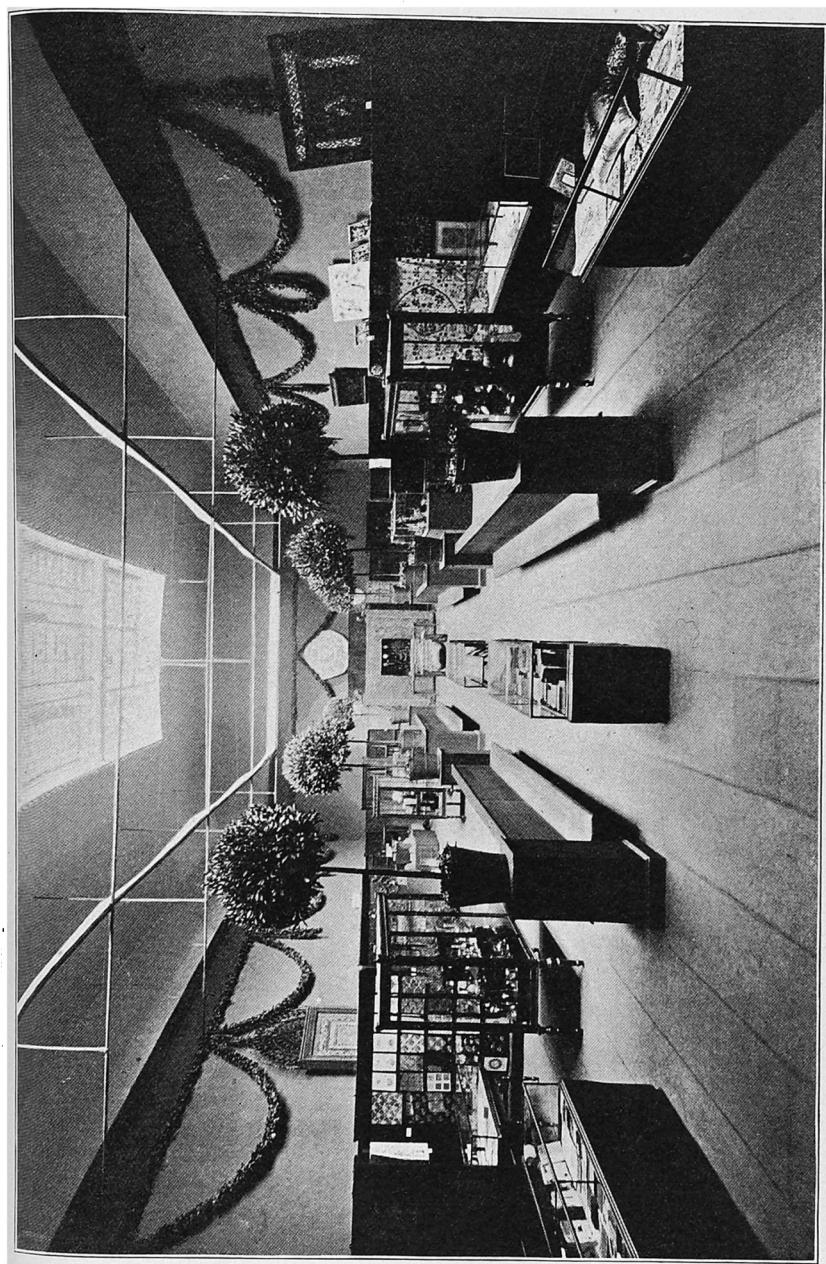
"It will follow also from the principles stated, that machine-executed ornament must necessarily lack artistic character. Machinery has wonderfully facilitated production, but it has its limitations. It should be confined to doing merely mechanical work. In many artistic crafts mechanical processes enter which can be better done by machinery; but artistic quality can only be given by handiwork. In making purchases, therefore, we should instinctively avoid machine made decoration and ornament.

"For these reasons the Society of Arts and Crafts wishes, above all, to recognize the individuality of the craftsman, and would encourage in him an appreciation of the dignity of his own craft."

The work of the Society is divided among Committees on Membership, Exhibitions, Work-shops, Library and Lectures, and Finance.



BISHOP'S CHAIR, DESIGNED BY HENRY VAUGHN,
BOSTON. CARVED BY I. KIRCHMAYER, BOSTON.



COPLEY HALL
EXHIBITION OF ARTS AND CRAFTS SOCIETY, BOSTON

An exhibition was determined upon last fall, and announcements of the conditions and rules were made the first of this year. While there have been other exhibitions of somewhat similar character, it may be of value to those who are interested in a similar movement to know some of the methods and conditions under which this exhibition was held. In contrast with American fairs and exhibitions in which certain space is allotted to the exhibitor, no definite spaces were assigned, as the admission of exhibits was in every case conditioned upon the design and craftsmanship shown in everything which entered into the exhibit. The applicant was first required to fill out an entry blank, stating what he wished to exhibit, together with some description or photograph. If the committee had definite knowl-



GRUEBY POTTERY, DESIGNED BY GEO. P. KENDRICK
MADE BY GRUEBY FAIENCE CO., BOSTON

edge of the exhibit, the application was either accepted or declined at once. When no definite information was at hand, either a sub-committee was appointed to examine the proposed exhibit, or the applicant was notified to send it to the committee's rooms that it might be examined and passed upon. No charge was made for space in the exhibition halls, but each exhibitor had to pay all expense of transportation and arrangement of exhibits. To be consistent with the objects of the Society and its exhibitor, everything had to be arranged in the best manner possible, hence the arrangement of every exhibit was subject to the direction and approval of the Exhibition Committee. The selection of exhibits was based on the principles given in the extract which has already been quoted from the circular. Some of the rules governing the exhibition were as follows:

"The exhibition committee has the right to reject any, or all, objects submitted by any person for exhibition. The question of the exhibition of any object will be decided by the committee on their

judgment of its merits with regard to excellence of design and artistic and craftsmanlike finish.

"Each application must be accompanied by a form (to be had on application) properly filled, giving the name of the individual designer, or craftsman, or both, and the date of manufacture. If several persons have been concerned in the manufacture this must be stated, and, where possible, each person so concerned must be named. No exhibits will be considered which are sent under a firm name, unless the name of the individual designer or craftsman is also given. Failure to comply with this regulation will result in the rejection of the exhibit."

At the outset, a little difficulty and friction was caused by the condition requiring firms to give the name of the individual designer and craftsman concerned, but those who understood and were in sympathy with the movement readily acceded to it.

An examination of the illustration of the Hall will show the general method of arranging exhibits. On either side were screens projecting about eight feet from the wall. These, covered with neutral colored stuff, formed an excellent background for photographs, drawings, and some of the larger pieces of embroidery, and smaller pieces of carving and metal work. In the centers of the alcoves formed by these screens were placed the larger and heavier exhibits which required floor space. Through the central aisle were cases containing fine book bindings, metal work, and other small exhibits which were of necessity shown under glass.

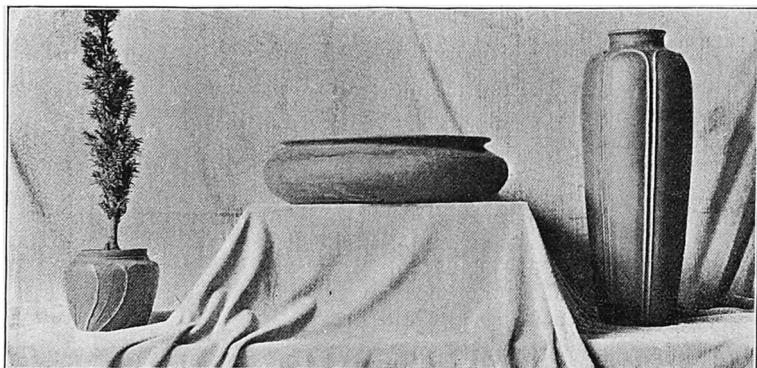
Many of the more important exhibits were by firms engaged in industrial art, such as fine glass and metal work, jewelry and pottery. Another class of exhibits represented designers and craftsmen, who, having the time and opportunity, had devoted themselves to certain lines of work, striving for ideals, more than following their craft as a livelihood. Such exhibits, being largely a labor of love, formed some of the best examples of craftsmanship.

The specific and direct aim of an exhibition of this kind should be to have the most practical application to industrial arts, so that the most common objects should be shown in good design and execution. This exhibition was deficient in this respect; in furniture, wall papers, and ordinary household utensils, very little was offered which the committee could accept. This was because the more common objects were largely machine-made, and with ornamentation entirely without regard to the uses of the object. This exhibition, and those in other communities, will emphasize this lack of good design and execution in commonplace things; and in some measure prove an incentive to efforts in this direction.

One writer, commenting on this exhibition, says that manufacturers are more vitally interested in the success of the movement represented by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition than many of them

realize. Interstate and international competition has brought it to pass that style in products is of more value to the maker to-day than it was yesterday. It will be increasingly so, everywhere and always. Trusts cannot affect the manufacturer who has created a corner in style. Tariffs cannot keep out the highest class of artistic goods. People will pay extra for that indefinable touch above the common known as "style."

The French government maintains its hundreds of free schools of



GRUEBY POTTERY, DESIGNED BY GEO. P. KENDRICK
MADE BY GRUEBY FAIENCE CO., BOSTON

design and of industrial art for no other reason than that experience shows the very life of her manufacturing industries depends on the superior beauty and style of their goods, and they must have good designers.

We do not believe that a great school of art—whether in architecture, sculpture, painting, or whatever—can ever be evolved out of the conditions of American life without having its origin in the mills and shops of the land. This is what the Society of Arts and Crafts knows too, that everything that is to succeed must be begun at the foundation. The time is ripe for effective work along these lines.

HENRY LEWIS JOHNSON,
Sec'y of Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Mass.